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Abstract

This article argues for a certain kind of pluralism in the context of the secular university that would afford Christians the opportunity to more intentionally bring their religious convictions and resources to their lived experiences and academic pursuits. It points to possibilities in what pertains to the place of believers while also reminding the Church of what it ought to be in these shared educational spaces: a community of worship, not of domination. As both the university and the Church rethink ways in which to respectfully engage with one another, thus taking faith commitments more seriously, collaboration among all members of the secular academy can lead to the flourishing of all human life. Amidst apprehensions and challenges discussed, the author reasons that, through hospitality and mutual understanding, the Church can become an authentic member of the academy, complementing the aims of the secular university and thus of pluralism itself.

Introduction

The academy places great value and emphasis on various diversity issues (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.). That said, conversations about the role of religion seem less prominent, particularly, but not exclusively, in secular institutions of higher education. This article discusses some of the apprehensions that may account for this apparent disconnect and the importance of reimagining the Church's place and role in the American academy. While acknowledging challenges, this article also explores how hospitality toward Christians (a hospitality that ought to be reciprocated by them) can benefit all who share in these pluralistic spaces.

It is important to note that as religion becomes a pivotal identity marker in the twenty-first century (Prothero, 2007), students and scholars should not wonder *whether* they might engage with the religiously diverse other (be they Christians, non-Christians, or even non-religious persons) but *how* these engagements will inevitably play out in the pluralistic space of the university. Admittedly, engagement will point to possibilities and challenges. Yet, pluralism—that is, the work and workings of diversity in the academy as a mirror of public life at large—obliges us to pay closer attention to how religion intersects with the pursuits and activities of many members of the American academy whose lives are informed and oriented by particular (for we cannot speak of "religion" in generic terms) religious commitments.

Affording the Church (i.e., the larger Body of Christ) an authentic membership in the academy contributes to a certain kind of pluralism that allows all members to bring their whole selves to their lived experiences and pursuits. Yet the Church should seek to earn its membership without demanding it. This hinges on the Church's understanding of itself as a community of worshipers first and foremost, not a community of conquest requiring the world (and, by extension, the academy) to be Christian and think Christianly. That cannot be so, for believers are reminded to season their message "with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15, New International Version) as they witness to those who ask about the hope that informs their lives, both present and future. In doing so, the Church can hope to add meaning to the pluralistic space of American higher education where diversity of perspectives and identities animate this "marketplace of ideas."

Merited Apprehensions of the Secular Academy

Despite apprehensions, many secular institutions have embraced initiatives to recognize and honor the commitments of their religious members. This can be observed in the interfaith work that many campuses engage in, the study of religion and theology (even though still timid at this point compared to other fields) as disciplines from where individuals explore questions of meaning, and the recognition of religious student organizations even in public universities, among other initiatives within constitutional boundaries. That is reason for optimism.

At the same time, addressing faith and religious convictions in the context of secular universities remains a tenuous task, giving rise, in some instances, to a certain "sensitivity" that leads many to abandon the effort all together. There are reasons for that. In what pertains to public institutions in particular, some, on the basis of a certain interpretation of the law, argue for the impermeability of the "wall of separation" between church and state. Others, staking their claims on the values of a liberal society, propose that religion should remain within the constraints of one's private life. Yet others, while receptive to religious views and acknowledging religion as a noteworthy human pursuit, appeal instead to neutrality. Adding to this argument, many aim at a desired objectivity, highly prominent and purportedly needed in the academy. Some also insist that since religious arguments are not accessible to all (especially non-religious people), they do not belong in the university. More, let us not forget arguments stemming from the values of a liberal education, which suggest that the possible mismanagement of religion as a conversation partner in the secular university could give way to indoctrination. Liberal values that seemingly inform this stance signal that while one is free to believe, others' convictions (i.e., their freedom to believe alternatively or not believe at all) should not be intruded upon. These reasons are not completely unreasonable. What needs some care is the extent to which they might corroborate with the perception that religious voices do not belong in the academy at all.

At one point, many also thought that the world was becoming increasingly secular and that religion had lost (or would eventually lose) its place in modern society. This notion was grounded on "secularization theory," now fallen into disuse (Berger, 1999). By the late 1990s a new outlook in public life was in place. "The assumption that we live in a secularized world," Peter Berger (1999) argued, "is false. The world today

is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever" (p. 2). In fact, since modernity has added a great deal of uncertainty in the lives of citizens, religion, to the extent that it provides some certainty to individuals, has regained its appeal to a great number of people in their relentless quest for meaning (Berger, 1999). Yet, there remains a sense that the academy is still far from making room for questions of meaning which address what living is for (Kronman, 2017), questions that often stem from spiritual and religious perspectives (Nash & Murray, 2010).

Most of these arguments have been dealt with by philosophers, theologians, legal scholars, educators, and others who not only affirm but also explain the necessity of expanding both the role and the place of religion in the academy. At the same time, a more generous read of the landscape of certain secular institutions might lead us to appreciate the fact that some therein simply do not know how to properly give voice to religious people. In these instances, reticence to enlarge conversational spaces to include religious views may stem from a genuine concern as to how to most adequately and respectfully address the inner narratives from which many in the academy draw meaning for their lives, work, and academic pursuits.

It is also worth noting that when we speak of secularity we are not simply dealing with the fact that beliefs are disappearing from public life (e.g., as a "subtraction" narrative articulated by secularization theory), but rather with an acknowledgement that, in the modern world, belief in God has become one among other human possibilities (Taylor, 2007). In spite of this outlook on secularity, there are hopeful hints that religion has regained some ground in the university. An optimistic body of research compiled by Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) points to the fact that many institutions have been turning their attention back to religion admitting its importance and presence on university campuses through the lives of religious students and scholars. The authors offer three noteworthy considerations: (1) that religion, in its pluriformity, has both returned and become much more visible in higher education in the last two decades; (2) that religion is no longer thought of as an add-on to the purposes of learning, especially as colleges and universities live out their commitment to understand the world as it really is, with religion, like it or not, consisting of a significant part of the world (both the "outer" and "inner" world of individuals); and (3) that paying more careful attention

to religion while properly handling it can actually help to revitalize higher education as a whole. Moreover, they contend that

> The religio-secular realities of life in America today are much more about questing and questioning than they are about defending or imposing the ideas and ideals of any particular religion on anyone else. It is this new mode of religion that may allow the academy to recapture a nearly lost conversation about "things that really matter" and how these deeper concerns of life relate to the more practical skills and knowledge that colleges and universities also convey to students. (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 156)

At the same time, it is important for us to observe that institutional claims for the importance of a diverse and inclusive educational environment often collide with Prothero's (2007) assessment that we live in a nation of religious illiterates. In my view, both the academy and, to an extent, the Church itself have contributed to this reality, thus cultivating an inability for each to properly recognize the other and their unique resources. I surmise that apprehensions on the part of the secular academy regarding religious convictions (some based on this kind of misunderstanding) spring up, to some degree, from such religious illiteracy.

Witnessing While Simply, yet Not Simplistically, "Being the Church"

In their seminal book *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, theologians Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon (1989) offer a provocative statement. Although made in theological terms, their assertion seems applicable to the world of higher education in which many Christians live. They state that the "political task of Christians is to be the church rather than to transform the world" (p. 38). On the surface, they seem to disregard Christ's Great Commission to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19, New International Version). We are reminded that witnessing and, by extension, discipleship are unavoidably linked to Christian practices. This makes the apparent tension all the more intriguing. That said, Hauerwas and Willimon's claim ought not to be understood as license for passivity on the part of the Church. A more careful reading of what they mean by "[being] the church" allows us to appreciate a particular interpretation of the role of Christians and a normative way in which believers ought to exist in the world in relation to others. So, they argue that while Christians ought to live and

fulfill their religious and political roles as active participants in society without compromising their religious convictions, their efforts should not center on modifying society through conquest, but rather on worshiping Christ in all things. Their proposition is far from mitigating all apprehensions in a pluralistic society. Many Christians will also find it wanting. Yet the authors invite believers to reconsider the way in which they live, as members of a community of worshipers, in a world that does not know Christ. In doing so, they remind the Church of an important priority, which is neither less engaging nor less evangelistic—that is, a redefinition of what counts as Christian living and mission (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989).

In light of that, we ask: What does this possibly mean for Christians who subscribe to this interpretation of their purpose and existence in the world (i.e., to most genuinely "be the church" without the need to transform the world), particularly, for the purpose of this discussion, the world of higher education? How can we reconcile Christian witness (often misperceived as an imposition upon the secular academy) to the proposition of simply "being" the Church in these pluralistic spaces?

For many, an authentic faith is often expressed through the opportunities believers find to "witness" by sharing the Good News of the Gospel with others. Witnessing—not to be confused with a thin, often misconstrued and caricatured conception of "proselytizing"—is, after all, a mark of a dynamic Christian faith. I am mindful, however, that such lively expressions account to a great degree for the very apprehensions noted above on the part of the secular academy. Yet the Church's determination to worship Christ in all things as a first order should incline believers to cultivate a non-coercive disposition to influencing the world (in this case, the world of higher education). By simply *being* something that the world neither can nor will ever be able to be—for other social institutions are not the Church—Christians would be in a better position to be a "community of the cross" (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 47): a self-giving, self-sacrificing community, contributing in faithful testimony or in spite of its infidelity, to the creation of structures more worthy of human society (Yoder, 1994b).

Hauerwas (2007) offers yet another important reminder: "[Christians] cannot avoid being in mission to witness what they believe God has done in Christ" (p. 67). However, the Church has to understand that adherence to Jesus' propositions should always happen through voluntary commitment (Yoder, 1994b), the reason why witnessing cannot be synonymous

with coercion. At the same time, "a major purpose of the Christian faith is to shape the lives of persons and communities" (Volf, 2011, p. 13). As Volf (2011) explains, for Christians, remaining idle would imply one of the "malfunctions of the Christian faith"—a misrepresentation of what it actually is, for "an idle faith is no Christian faith at all" (p. 16). In this vein, one can see that "being" the Church takes an active rather than a merely passive stance on how believers live (i.e., worshipfully) their religious convictions.

Pressing this point further, when such state of idleness is superficially imposed by a certain understanding of neutrality, equality, or toleration, the university compromises its commitment to these very principles. To require individuals to leave their religious convictions completely out of their academic or scholarly pursuits would simply stunt an educational process that seeks (or should seek) to develop "whole persons" informed by their inner narratives, convictions, and interpretive lenses. Such an imposition would also imply that the very differences claimed to be valuable in the secular academy have, in effect, no place therein. Moreover, education aimed at human flourishing (even though "flourishing" itself is pursued for different reasons—e.g., accounting for or discounting the "transcendent"; Taylor, 2007) should affirm religious resources that many will use for their growth and development.

At the same time, Christians ought not to neglect the method through which they engage others in the university. If one of the goals of the Church (assuming, in advance, it to be one among many authentic members of the academy) is to add value to these pluralistic spaces, it will seek to qualify what Jesus meant in his commission, "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19), with the virtue of respect for others who may define the flourishing life in different terms, religious or otherwise. This kind of respect stems from the Church's "being" in Christ—that is, not a mere civic virtue, but inspired by a value congruent with God's kingdom. After all, what believers should seek is a legitimate membership, not special privileges in the academy.

The Challenging Prospect of Making Room at the University for Religious Voices

Kunzman (2006) posits that it is in the context of broad ethical questions that religion often finds its place in classroom dialogues. He explains that, as these questions are raised, teachers can hesitate giving religious voices a hearing, assuming students would not be able to properly

resolve their ethical disputes. Extending his argument to the university, we are reminded by the author that if one of our educational goals is to foster thoughtful citizenship, institutions should provide a way for students to learn how to talk about ethical differences while communicating and deliberating respectfully among differing and unfamiliar ethical perspectives informed by both religious and secular views (Kunzman, 2006). "Respect" thus becomes a more robust virtue than the ambiguous idea of "toleration" which, if not properly qualified, can turn into a conversation stopper or a call for merely "putting up with one another." Pluralism grounded on deep respect for differences—one that invites the possibility of mutual understanding, not necessarily agreement—holds a better promise for a more stimulating educational space.

So, it seems that a more sophisticated (yet arguably still contested) way in which the secular university may call for and practice toleration while keeping ethical conversations flowing, would stem from the academy's capacity—or at least a desire—to affirm its secular, not secularist nature, in other words, defining neutrality toward religious convictions as to make room for them, not its readiness to fiercely oppose them. "We need," as Wolterstorff asserts, "a politics that not only honors us in our similarities as free and equal, but in our particularities. For our particularities—some of them—are constitutive of who we are, constitutive of our narrative identities" (Audi & Wolterstorff, 1997, p. 111). However, such neutrality with respect to one's particular religious views should be a principle that is worked out on the part of the institution and all of its members. In short, it needs to be learned, modeled, and practiced. In fact, respect can serve as a mediating virtue (thus helping pluralism to transcend rhetoric) when a concerted effort is made to keep lines of communication open for religious ideas to flow in this professed "secular" space. In turn, this would provide a meaningful way for Christians to advance their purposes in the academy while taking into account their religious convictions. While a challenging prospect, the academy, with all of its resources (intellectual and otherwise), can in effect encourage the Church to more authentically participate in this shared space. The question is: Is it also willing?

Volf (2011), like others, explains that it is important for those who do not share a religious vision of the world to recognize that Christians see their religion as an integrated way of life and an overarching means of interpreting reality through conviction, attitudes, and practices that allow believers to live well, in the light of how God created them to live.

In other words, Christianity is not (or should not be) just a private accessory of one's life. It is (or it should be) one's very identity, lived out in all spheres of life. In doing so, Christians can make a unique contribution in the secular academy.

Hauerwas and Willimon (1989) also posit that it is through the educational role of the Church that we learn "the interpretive skills whereby we know honestly how to name what is happening [around us] and what to do about it" (p. 146). And by learning to see and name the world through a different lens (i.e., through the eyes of God), Christians offer an important gift to others at the university, especially when, in return, they are encouraged to articulate their faith-informed perspectives and provide intelligent and intelligible (not necessarily in agreement with others) answers for the questions they ask. In doing so, secular institutions may not only challenge Christians to elevate the quality of their arguments but also afford non-Christians the opportunity to hear and understand an alternative (i.e., religious) view of what many believers explore in the academy. Such generous exchanges could prove to be productive and instructive: the secular academy could learn something unique from the Church while helping believers to better understand other ways of being in and interpreting the world.

With room for such kind of mutual engagement (and, most importantly, mutual understanding), Christians can add diversity of thought, thus adding value and legitimacy to pluralistic educational environments. Christians may ask different questions and explore answers from different angles (e.g., from the perspective of their faith-informed worldview or their spiritual narratives); their commitment to truth, so essential to Christian thought and desired by the very principles of a liberal education, can propel Christians to find answers for questions in places where non-believers may be either unwilling or under equipped to search for. And while the so-called objectivity is so prized in the secular academy, institutional commitment to diversity and pluralism should also compel the university to welcome subjective understandings (i.e., knowing in relationship, not at arms' length; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010: in the case of Christians, in relation to God and his creation) that can enrich and add perspective to what is studied and known.

In living their faith truthfully in the context of these pluralistic spaces, Christians should also aspire to conduct themselves in all that they do with the highest level of integrity, prioritizing the flourishing of all rather than merely seeking personal gains. They should seek to live at

peace with others, to cultivate an attitude of service, and to love others as themselves (Matthew 22:39), gifts that should be highly attractive to and desirable by the university. Naturally, some would rightly contend that this is a task not exclusively reserved for the Church. The non-believer should be just as invested in conducting truthful inquiries and maintaining integrity in their academic pursuits; they should also be capable and free to search for answers for their questions anywhere, including in the Church, if they so desire. Most importantly, they should be just as willing to serve and extend love to others. That said, the difference in these seemingly equal dispositions of believers and non-believers is, as the theological ethicist James Gustafson (1975) reminds us, that the Christian has a special obligation to act morally. To live out what they profess to believe is not only what the culture expects of them, but God himself.

Yet this is only part of the reason. By such an obligation, one could also read "as an expression of worship": not by decree, man-made ethical code, or fear of punishment. Rather, the motivation for Christians lies elsewhere, for the Church is called to "do everything for God's glory" (1 Corinthians 10:31, Holman Christian Standard Bible), "enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men" (Colossians 3:23, HCSB). The bar is not merely higher for Christians because there is a God "looking over their shoulders," standing ready to approve or disapprove of what they do. To be sure, God's favor is a desirable aim for believers who seek it not by compulsion but by willing devotion and gratitude for gifts that come from above (James, 1:17). In the case of Christians, it is not just their obligation that is higher than others, but also their aspiration. They learn, through worship, to look up and to search "above" worldly and earthly possibilities, as important as that may be. The very idea of the secular is juxtaposed with the Church's understanding of the sacred, for "the earth is the LORD's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1, New International Version). There is no "secular" in the strictest sense of the word—not for Christians. It follows that the Church needs not to set itself in opposition to all things secular (and, by extension, to non-believers)—at least not as a default stance in the university. Rather, with a proper view of creation, and where the integrity of their convictions is not compromised, Christians can collaborate with other religious and non-religious members of the academy, adding unique value and perspective to shared goals.

We are reminded by Volf (2011) that "faith does its most proper work when it [does three things]: (1) [it] sets us on a journey, (2) [it] guides

us along the way, and (3) [it] gives meaning to each step we take" (p. 16). This is not just a statement of faith apart from the activity of the believer. If faith is integrated in the overall life of the believer and not just, as Volf also argues, an "add-on" (p. 101), it should not be hard to conceive that, for the believer who is socially engaged with various members of the academy, this same faith—if I may extrapolate this argument to the university— is that which often (1) sets them on a particular academic journey, (2) guides them along the way (e.g., orients their prayers and practices in the academy as to glorify God in all things), and (3) gives meaning to each step that they take in their academic and scholarly pursuits. This adds meaning to a believer's understanding of a "whole life."

Toward Hospitality and an Authentic Membership

Despite these possibilities, considering what many Christians aim at (along with the role of "witnessing"), affording an authentic membership to the Church in the secular academy will likely remain a challenging prospect. Because of that, both the Church and the academy have some work to do. They can start here, as Prothero (2007) suggests: all must attempt at becoming more religiously literate by acquiring some basic knowledge of religion so that all might arrive at a more generous understanding of how religion shapes private and public life. That said, for believers this is an even taller order. More literacy about their own faith allows them to be an even better representative of the God they serve, living their convictions, as Yoder (1994a) puts it, as a "herald," not a crusader. In fact, Christians share the burden of literacy with nonbelievers, for, admittedly, many of them are often just as unreflective as anyone else in the academy about how their faith informs their pursuits (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2004).

Extending a more generous hospitality toward believers may seem like a risky endeavor. Yet the effort on the part of the secular academy should not be left untried. This would, nonetheless, require the university to take the Christian faith seriously enough, engaging it more intentionally. This includes challenging it when and if needed (Volf, 2011), especially when one's interest is set aside so that public discourse, in line with the idea of a liberal democracy, is governed by respect for the particularities of one's fellow citizens (Audi & Wolterstorff, 1997). However, for such level of respect and hospitality to become a reality, the academy must first recognize that there ought not to be differentiated levels of membership. Citizens of the academy can be equal in intrinsic worth and, at

the same time, hold different views, motivated by different aims and a different set of convictions.

Warnick's (2013) analysis of K-12 education serves, in my estimation, as a pertinent warning to higher education. He posits that although controversial and even offensive at times, when students' freedom to publicly express themselves (and here I would include the expression of their religious views and ideas) is suppressed, troubling consequences can be expected:

> (1) On an internal level, the individual's sense of integrity is compromised; conforming to external pressure, the individual cannot live her life "from the inside"; (2) On the external level, other people are more likely to misrecognize the person who lacks expressive freedoms. The person is less able to tell other people about who she really thinks she is, and she is forced to live what she considers to be a false life in the eyes of others. (Warnick, 2013, p. 70)

Where peacefully expressed, diverse views, voices, and convictions matter. Anchored in respect, hospitality can affirm people's freedom to think and to publicly articulate their thinking religiously. This can enrich life in the university, ensuring a stimulating educational environment. Conversely, the suppression of such freedoms and ideals would be, borrowing and extrapolating on Volf's (2011) terminology, a malfunction of the secular academy.

Since being the church implies a worshipful, not a domineering presence in pluralistic educational spaces, looking to various freedoms (e.g., speech, expression, association, etc.) is but one avenue through which we can see what may be lost when individuals are prevented from bringing religious views to bear in what they pursue in the academy. Smith (2009) reminds us that the university is not merely a place where information is dispensed but, in effect, an environment full of rituals that contribute to the formation of individuals. By ritualizing silence of certain inner narratives in the academy, religious voices are shaped and trained over time to not only suppress but also forget how their inner and communal narratives (e.g., the language and practices of the Church) inform—or could inform—their academic pursuits as well as the meaning they attribute to them. What's more, in the silencing or suppression of such religious narratives, diversity gives way to uniformity. Pluralism loses its appeal and purpose. Consequently, what is lost is the opportunity for all members of the academy to recognize different voices and understand

different worldviews that account for pluralism in the first place. When considering, for instance, the important work of student development, what is also lost is an opportunity for the formation of citizens who are increasingly attuned to a world that is not only diverse in its religious makeup but also pluralistic in the way such diversity may be expressed and negotiated in everyday encounters among individuals within and outside of the university.

At the same time, since views and motivations matter, Christians ought to still remember that the complexity of the argument that calls for them to simply "be the church" instead of aiming for domination (e.g., by clinging solely to "rights") lies on its very simplicity. While the Church cannot be excused from its mission to mend the world and see to it that humans would flourish (Volf, 2011), it ought to grapple with its first priority: to learn to worship God in all things, through words and deeds. Unfortunately, history reminds us that the Church has often fallen short of that aspiration and biblical understanding, consequently misrepresenting not only its religion, but its Christ. Congruent Christian living, which is not merely dependent on rights (albeit commitments can indeed be facilitated by them) but on habits of worship, allows believers to more authentically engage with others in the academy. This requires the Church to attend carefully to the landscape of the secular academy (i.e., its aims, its claims, its formative practices, its diverse members, etc.) with a high degree of discernment, choosing respect that emanates from God's love and purpose that all humankind should flourish through *shalom*.

In sum, the Church's real challenge lies not in asking, "how can the secular academy offer a more inclusive and equitable way in which we can seek an authentic membership while retaining our religious convictions?" The more pertinent question, which stems from what it means to be the Church (i.e., a community of worship), is: "how can we better align our living with our love for God and his creation so that the academy would be more inclined to live more purposefully its commitment to pluralism—e.g., making room for religious voices—as to find it important enough to grant us (i.e., the Church) an authentic membership?"

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